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Opening Statement to the Defense Subcommittee – House Appropriations Committee

On

Posture of the United States Marine Corps

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Chairman Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member Visclosky, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today. I'm honored to be here with Secretary Mabus and Admiral Greenert to represent your Marines.

I'll begin by thanking the committee for your steadfast support over the past 13 years. Due to your leadership, we have fielded the best trained and equipped Marine Corps our nation has ever sent to war.

I know this committee and the American people have high expectations for Marines as our Nation's expeditionary force-in-readiness.

You expect your Marines to operate forward, engage with our partners, deter potential adversaries, and respond to crises. And when we fight, you expect us to win. You expect a lot of your Marines, and you should.

This morning, as you hold this hearing, over 31,000 Marines are forward deployed and engaged, doing just what you expect them to be doing.

Our role as the Nation's expeditionary force-in-readiness, informs how we man, train, and equip the Marine Corps. It also prioritizes the allocation of resources we receive from Congress.

Over the past few years, we have prioritized the readiness of our forward deployed forces. Those are the forces you can count on for the immediate response to crisis. Those are the forces that supported the recent evacuation of U.S. citizens in South Sudan, Libya, and Yemen. Those are the forces currently conducting strikes in Syria and Iraq, training the Iraqi Army, and protecting our embassy in Baghdad. Those are the 22,500 Marines in the Pacific, west of the International Date Line.

I can assure you that your forward deployed Marines are well-trained, well-led and well-equipped, but we've had to make tough choices to deal with the effects of two wars, sequestration in 2013, and reduced budgets in 2014 and 2015.

In order to maintain the readiness of our forward deployed forces, we have not sufficiently invested in our home-station readiness, modernization, infrastructure sustainment, and quality-of-life programs. As a result, approximately half of our non-deployed units, those are the ones who provide the bench to respond to unforeseen contingencies, are suffering personnel, equipment, and training shortfalls. In a major conflict, those shortfalls will result in a delayed response and/or the unnecessary loss of young American lives.

Over time, underinvesting in modernization will result in maintaining older or obsolete equipment at higher cost and degraded capabilities. It will eventually erode our competitive advantage, and we don't ever want our Marines and Sailors in a fair fight.

The readiness challenges we have today provide context for my message this morning.

We can meet the requirements of Defense Strategic Guidance with the President's budget, but there is no margin.

BCA funding levels will exacerbate the challenges we have today. It will also result in a Marine Corps with fewer available active duty battalions and squadrons than would be required for a single major contingency.

Perhaps more concerning, it will result in fewer Marines and Sailors being forward deployed and in a position to immediately respond to a crisis involving our diplomatic posts, American citizens, or U.S. interests.

As we saw in the wake of Benghazi, the American people expect us to respond to today's crisis... today, and we can only do that if we are properly postured forward.

In closing, my assessment is that funding below the President's budget level will require that we develop a new strategy.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to appear before you this morning and for your leadership in addressing today's fiscal challenges. I look forward to your questions.